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AUTHOR Williams, Ellen U.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

University training programs and public school systems must address the development of beginning teacher assistance programs which include the use of mentors. This paper describes Project RAISE (Rural America Institute for Special Educators), a masters level program that trains preservice and practicing special education teachers. This project addresses the high attrition rates among beginning special education teachers in rural settings. The project included coursework on rural special education service delivery, practica and field assignments, field-based research projects, and a mentoring model for beginning teachers in rural special education. Five preservice special education teachers and five practicing rural special education teachers were selected through a screening and referral process. The beginning and veteran teachers were paired and team taught in a rural school setting. The program and required coursework were designed to promote the mentor-mentee relationship between the beginning and veteran teachers. Supervision was provided by university project coordinators. Within 1 year, the teachers completed a masters degree in special education and acquired the skills and knowledge relevant to teaching in rural special education. Lists of criteria for selection of teachers, required coursework, and schedule of program activities are included. (25 references) (LP)

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Co-Presenter: Veronica Gold
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Ellen U. Williams, Ph.D
Veronica Gold, Ph.D
Steven C. Russell, Ph.D

Department of Special Education
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403

A Teacher Training Mentor Model in Rural Special Education

INTRODUCTION

The teaching profession has begun to address the need for beginning teacher assistance programs for all first year educators. In addition to the typical problems facing most entry level teachers, those novice teachers who are in rural special education settings may be facing additional problems compounding their adjustment to the profession. Matthes and Carlson (1978) point out that recruitment and retention of good teachers are serious problems for rural schools. An added problem for rural schools is the high attrition rate for special education personnel. Helge (1979) reported an average annual turnover rate of 30-50 percent among rural special educators. How can rural school systems attract and retain quality special education staff?

Massey and Crosby (1983) believe that one solution for ameliorating these recruitment/retention problems is to better prepare teachers for handling special education problems in rural environments. Marrs (1984) supports this suggestion, noting that rural special education personnel who are specifically trained to work with rural handicapped programs will have greater personal and professional success. Marrs further encourages rural special education preservice preparation programs to have more focus on rural course content and experience.

One such attempt to provide this emphasis in rural special education preservice training is found in a federal grant project at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. This training project, Project RAISE (Rural America Institute for Special Educators) is a graduate level program that offers rural focus for content and experiential learning. This project includes a mentor program for entry level special education teachers in rural schools.

In Support of Teacher Assistance Programs for First Year Teachers

The decade of the 1980's was filled with numerous national reports highlighting suggested school reforms. National reports such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (1985), the Holme's Group (1986), the Carnegie Forum (1986), and the Association of Teacher Educators (1987) all suggest that these school reforms include plans for providing assistance to the first year teacher. If these neophyte teachers are not supported with assistance and support, they may become disillusioned and leave the teaching profession. Schlechty and Vance (1983) estimate that approximately 30 percent of beginning teachers are not teaching two years later from their initial employment date. They further

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postulate that 40-50 percent leave during their first seven years of teaching. Howey and Zimpher (1987) report a similar dropout rate of young teachers nearing 50 percent during the first five years of teaching. If these figures are indicative of national attrition rates for beginning teachers, the teaching profession must accept the charge of ameliorating or increasing the retention rate for entry level teachers. The teaching profession must identify the causes of these mass exoduses as well as develop plans to reduce this phenomena of "neophyte teacher flight".

Morey (1990) cites the following reasons why teachers leave the classroom: conditions of work; salary level; lack of career ladders; non-teaching assignments; class size; and, lack of adequate resources. Moran (1990) suggests that beginning teachers are often unprepared for the degree of expertise expected of them and unprepared for the rigor and complexity of the classroom. Moran notes that while the beginning teacher is seeking to "feel at home" in the teaching profession, they are all too often sensing dislocation and professional and social isolation. She proposes that beginner peer support groups be formed where neophyte teachers are provided with seasoned mentors. Henry (1989) sees the following three types of support as promising for assisting beginning teachers: mentor support, peer support, and university support. He prioritizes these support systems by referring to the mentor support system as the most typical and most critical component of teacher induction programs.

In Support of Mentoring Programs for First Year Teachers

According to Odell (1990a) historical and literary works characterize the term "mentor" in the same contexts with advisors, helpers, sponsors, one who offers insight and guidance, one who is older and more experienced, and one who is committed to help younger less experienced persons. Mentors have also been viewed as guides to help people grow up. The original illustration of "mentor" can be found in the poem, Odyssey by Homer (Fitzgerald, 1961). When Odysseus goes off to war, he asks his loyal friend Mentor to look after his son, Telemachus. Mentor acts as a guide for Telemachus as he grows up. Mentor committed time and energy to guide Telemachus to a point of self-reliance where he could think and act on his own. Thus, the term "mentor" as first seen in Odyssey has come to be associated with the role of modeling a standard/style of behavior in an intentional nurturing, insightful, supportive process (Anderson and Shannon, 1988). Kay (1990) describes mentoring as a current educational practice for beginning teacher assistance programs in which experienced educators are assigned as mentors for neophyte teachers. The role of the mentor is to assist the new teacher in making an effective and non-traumatic transition into full-time teaching. Waters and Bernhardt (1989) categorize the roles of mentor teachers as providing the following: 1) orientation and resources; 2) psychological support; 3) curriculum and instructional advice; 4) classroom modeling; 5) observation and feedback; 6) assistance in implementing a specific instruction program; and 7) assessment. Odell (1990a) has compiled a sample list of mentor roles as drawn from he literature on mentoring. Sample mentoring roles include the following: trusted guide, teacher, sponsor, host, counselor, supporter, guru, advisor, coach, trainer, positive role model, protector, patron, challenger, confidant and master teacher. Mentoring programs in teaching assume that beginning teachers have much to learn about teaching. Teacher

mentor programs usually begin in the early stages of teaching and continue as a lifelong process of development.

Obviously, there is a need to use care in selecting the mentor teachers. According to Huling-Austin, Putman, and Galvez-Hjornevik (1985), the most powerful and cost-effective intervention in a teacher induction program is the assignment of an appropriate support teacher. Butler (1987) identified a number of the following personal mentor characteristics as essential to the development of a positive mentor-protege relationship: 1) prior experiences in assisting student teachers and novice teachers; 2) years of experience as a classroom teacher; 3) willingness to commit time to the mentee early in the relationship; 4) ability to conceptualize the mentor's role as needing to change based on the progress of the mentee; and 5) possessing high status within school/profession. Huffman and Leak (1986) add the following two mentor variables as valuable: having a mentor who teaches the same grade level/subject matter; and, providing adequate formal and informal time. Because the mentor teacher's role is so extensive, it is recommended that mentors be trained on how to provide support and assistance (Huling-Austin, & Murphy, 1987). Kilgore and Kozisek (1988) support the notion of training mentors as well as providing school support, recognition and reward for the mentor's efforts.

Odell (1990a) offers the following three goals for mentoring beginning teachers:

Goal 1: To provide beginning teachers with guidance from mentor teaches so as to promote the professional development of beginning teachers.

Goal 2: To provide beginning teachers with support and information from mentor teachers so as to reduce the concerns of beginning teachers, and

Goal 3: To increase through mentoring, the retention of beginning teachers.

Odell (1990a) also offers the following phases for the teacher mentoring process;

Phase 1: Developing the relationship (Conveying support and assistance for the mentee)

Phase 2: Determining the content (What does the mentee need?)

Phase 3: Applying effective styles and strategies, and selecting styles of mentoring (Optimizing mentor/mentee communications and interactions).

Phase 4: Disengaging the relationship (Directing the mentee to move toward self-reliance).

The ultimate goal of the mentor should be to prepare new teachers to become "automentors" who mentor themselves on a continuum toward professional

actualization (Odell, 1990b).

Application of the Process for Rural Special Education

Project RAISE (Rural America Institute for Special Educators) is a three year federal grant awarded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services to the Department of Special Education at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio. The primary focus of Project RAISE is to enhance the service delivery of rural special education by training preservice and practicing teachers to focus on rural concepts, concerns, problems and solutions. The training project involves a one year graduate program which includes the following components:

1) University graduate level coursework which focuses on knowledge, skills, attitudes and values related to rural special education service delivery;
2) Practica and field assignments related to rural special education service delivery;
3) Field-based research projects related to rural special education; and
4) A mentoring model for first year teachers in rural special education.

Ten participants (five preservice special education teachers and five practicing rural special education teachers) are selected through a screening and referral process. Figure 1 provides an overview of criteria used to select the mentors and mentees.

Insert Figure 1 about here

In the Spring, each of the five special education preservice teachers are paired with a practicing veteran special education teacher in a rural school setting. Through student teaching, practica experiences or field placements, the paired mentor/mentee teams begin to develop the mentor/mentee relationship by exploring a bonding process to insure compatibility and effective communication levels. University supervision and support are provided by the Project coordinators and by the school administrative staff at the selected rural sites. Consultation is provided by Project RAISE coordinators for Project participants on an individual as well as a team basis. Project coordinators also work to promote greater support and understanding on the part of the school administration toward the mentor/mentee process.

In the Summer semester, all five teams begin their university graduate level coursework in rural special education. The coursework includes information on teaching strategies and delivery of service for special education in rural environments. Heavy emphasis is placed on consultation and collaboration skills with teachers, administration, support staff, ancillary personnel, parents and community. In the Fall semester, the teams engage in a combination of university course and field-based experiences. The coursework and field experiences are designed to

promote the mentor/mentee relationship. Joint projects for mentor/mentee are frequently assigned. A similar coursework and field-based format is applied to the following Spring semester. Figure 2 provides a listing of Project RAISE coursework.

Insert Figure 2 about here

At the end of one year, the five preservice teachers and the five practicing teachers will have completed a research project on rural special education as well as the course requirements for a Masters Degree in Special Education. The practicing teachers will be able to obtain the degree without giving up a contracted job for the year. The preservice teachers will obtain the degree and will be able to purchase one year of service toward the state retirement system.

At the end of one year, both will have gained new knowledge and skills relative to teaching in rural special education, completed a Masters degree in Education, and engaged in a mentor/mentee process that may increase the likelihood of the first year teachers staying in rural education, in special education and in the education profession. Figure 3 offers a schedule of Project RAISE mentor/mentee activities.

Insert Figure 3 about here

CONCLUSION

Teacher preparation programs and the public school systems have a responsibility to foster the growth of beginning teachers. Without beginning teacher assistance programs, neophyte teachers may become disillusioned and frustrated with their early teaching experiences and opt to leave the profession. There are high attrition rates among beginning teachers and among special education teachers in rural settings. Project RAISE (Rural American Institute for Special Educators) is attempting to address these attrition problems by providing a mentoring program for first year teachers with veteran special education teachers in rural schools. The mentor/mentee work together in a graduate program in rural special education that involves coursework, field assignments, team teaching and research in rural special education. University supervision and collaboration are provided by Project RAISE coordinators throughout this process. The success of this mentoring model is dependent on numerous variables including the following: selection of beginning teachers; support of school administrative and supervisory staff; acceptance of teacher induction programs by other school personnel; training of support/mentor teachers; effective communication between university supervisory staff, veteran teachers, neophyte teachers and the school community; effective needs assessments of beginning and veteran teachers; and providing adequate coaching for the beginning teacher (Shulman &

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Colbert, 1987).

Teacher induction programs and mentoring programs just don't happen. They need to be collaboratively planned, organized and evaluated. If mentoring programs are to succeed in reducing the attrition rates of neophyte teachers in rural special education, then university training programs and public school systems must invest in the future of the beginning teacher assistance programs and in the future of beginning teachers.

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Figure 1

Selection Criteria for Project RAISE
Mentor/Mentee Teams

Mentees: Five mentees will be selected for each academic year. The preferred criteria includes the following:

1. Majors in any area of special education teacher training
2. Senior status and graduating at the end of Spring semester for the current academic year
3. Demonstrates academic proficiency (A "B" average or better)
4. Prior rural experience
5. Good communication skills (A positive interview with Project coordinators)
6. Signs of adaptability and flexibility

Mentors: Once the five mentees are selected, the five mentors will be selected. The preferred criteria includes the following:

1. Certified teachers presently teaching in rural special education.
2. Minimum of three years of teaching experience in rural special education.
3. Possessing a Bachelors Degree - desirous of a Masters Degree in Education.
4. Highly recommended by superiors for the mentor/mentee program.
5. Demonstrates a potential for completing graduate coursework (A "B" or better in undergraduate coursework).
6. Signs of good communications skills.
7. Signs of adaptability and flexibility.

Figure 2

Project RAISE Coursework for Graduate Degree
in Rural Special Education

Statistics in Education
Research in Education
Problems and Issues for Personnel in Rural Special Education
Foundations and Instructional Strategies for Rural Special Education
Professional Development Seminar in Special Education
Advanced Instructional Design for Rural Special Education
Collaboration for Related Services - Part I
Collaboration for Related Services - Part II
Practicum in Rural Special Education - Part I
Practicum in Rural Special Education - Part II
Thesis Research

Figure 3

Project RAISE Mentor/Mentee Model: Scheduled Activities

Spring Semester	
Mentee	Selection of preservice special education teachers (5)
Mentor	Selection of practicing rural special education teachers (5)
Mentor Mentee	Practica/Field Experience between practicing and preservice teachers (Exploration of bonding between mentor and mentee -- with University supervision).
Summer Semester	
Mentor Mentee	Practicing and Preservice teachers begin Masters Program coursework in Rural Special Education.
Fall Semester	
Mentor Mentee	Practicing and Preservice teachers team teach in the same rural class and continue graduate coursework in Rural Special Education.
Spring Semester	
Mentor Mentee	Practicing and Preservice teachers team teach, continue graduate coursework and conduct rural research project.
Summer Semester	
Mentor Mentee	Practicing and Preservice teachers complete rural research project and graduate with Masters Degree in Special Education.